

Diocesan Activity Report-NFP

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JOHN PAUL II

On December 13, 1985, speaking to the Pontifical Council for the Family, John Paul II emphasized that the Church's teaching helps people form their conscience "to discover the truth about things, the mystery and vocation of the human person, the profound meaning of his or her actions and relations." The Church's teaching is not a restrictive factor, but in highlighting the truth concerning the dignity of the person and the value of family life, it enables persons to make truly free and moral decisions. On the same day John Paul II told a Natural Family Planning Congress that they should help "form authentically Christian consciences that will be able to understand what is truly the will of God regarding human life and the duty of welcoming it and protecting it."

NEW EFFORTS AT SEX EDUCATION

Concern about the increase in teenage pregnancy and venereal disease is prompting new or intensified efforts to provide sex education in many school districts. The New York Times reported on a number of school districts across the country that are considering new approaches. Unfortunately, however, in the minds of many school officials and social service administrators, sex education means training in and provision of contraception, as well as referral for sterilization and abortion.

DuSable High School in Chicago is a case in point: the proposal is to provide contraception to the students so as to diminish teenage pregnancy. A recent New York Times editorial argues for a \$25 million increase in funding over the next five years to add new family planning clinics and provide free services for girls under 18.

There are two responses to all this. First of all, many of the sex education programs lack any value orientation and are devoid of moral or ethical principles. The provision of contraception and abortion does nothing to change teenage sexual patterns, but tends to increase the activity that leads to pregnancy and/or disease. Furthermore, school or community based family planning projects override the rights of parents and forestall the kind of communication and motivation that many teens are looking for.

Secondly, both the federal government and the states seem inclined to increase funding for worthwhile projects. In some cases this may create an opportunity for NFP personnel to help shape the direction of local programs or even to subcontract with a local school board. Some NFP teachers are already doing this, and Dr. Hanna Klaus has helped some dioceses establish programs. In light of all the attention, everyone can profit from a re-reading of Educational Guidance in Human Love, the 1983 document of the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education.

*Dist'd
H.S. Poma*

MARRIAGE & FERTILITY FACTS

(Compiled from U.S. Census Bureau Reports)

* Between 1970-1982, the proportion of the population that had never married increased. For females aged 20-24, the proportion yet single increased from 36% in 1970 to 53% in 1982; for males -- an increase from 55% in 1970 to 72% in 1982. For ages 25-29 during the same period, the female proportion yet single increased from 11% to 23% and the males from 19% to 36%.

* The proportion of adults 18-24 married and living in their own homes decreased from 56% in 1970 to 45% in 1983.

* There was an increase in unmarried persons living together, but the proportion of the total population is small. This universe is difficult to measure accurately, but the majority are persons under 35 years of age.

* As of June 1984, the fertility rate dropped to 65.8 births per 1000 women 18-34 years of age, down from 71.1 in 1980. In 1983 this translated into 1.79 children per family. The only group that showed an increase in fertility was the 30-34 age cohort. Fertility rates among Hispanic women were notably higher, i.e., 86.1 per 1000 women.

* Births to unwed mothers continue to climb, and now amount to one of every five births in the U.S. This occurs mostly among teenagers and among women 35-39 years of age.

* More than 75% of American women are beginning sexual activity before marriage, according to a 1982 study.

These facts show a delay in marriage and childbearing, smaller family size, a continuing trend toward the separation of sex from marriage, and for some, a questioning of the status of marriage in contemporary society.

Nonetheless, opinion surveys continue to show that Americans in general place a high value on marriage, do not favor the escalation of divorce rates, and are at least ambivalent -- if not opposed -- to sexual permissiveness.

MORE ON THE IUD

The A. H. Robins Company is now running ads in major newspapers and magazines urging former users of the Dalkon Shield to file their claims for damages against the Robins Company in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. In a new book, At Any Cost, (Pantheon Books), Morton Mintz describes Robins' marketing of the Dalkon Shield and the subsequent tragedies for thousands of women in terms of corporate preoccupation with profits and the absence of a sense of corporate ethics.

Nor is Robins alone. Charges have been filed against the G.D. Searle Company claiming negligence on the part of Searle, failure to warn women of the IUD's dangers and withholding of pertinent information. A Baltimore trial is underway.

Corporate irresponsibility is apparent in both cases, as is the general silence of the medical profession. But there is yet another factor. Many of the drug companies capitalized on the near-hysteria created by the population control and family planning lobbies that pressured couples to avoid pregnancy at almost any cost. Accurate population forecasting never warranted the lengths that people were pressed to, but especially during the 1960's and early 1970's, it was considered ludicrous to question the "population-bomb" thesis. So thousands of women paid with their health.

The fate of the drug companies revolves around their complicity in marketing an essentially dangerous device without ful-

disclosure of the risks. There is of course the further moral question, that is, of marketing as contraceptive a device that is essentially abortifacient, without clearly informing the users.

A NEW PILL--OR CHEMICAL ABORTION

Popular writing pretty well confirms that women are dissatisfied with, if not frightened of, the pill and IUD. Some experts believe it would take \$500 million a year for some decades to come up with the so-called "perfect contraceptive," which is described as safe, effective, easy to use and inexpensive. Curiously, the researchers keep passing over the natural methods and the scientific work, probably much less costly, that would make them more satisfactory to a larger clientele.

Now comes a new pill, RU-486, developed in France and presently being tested in Paris, Stockholm and the University of California. The mode of action is abortifacient. A woman takes RU-486 on the last 3 days of her cycle. If fertilization had occurred, the drug would prevent implantation. If not, it would bring on menstruation in 48 hours. In some tests RU-486 is combined with prosta-glandins, well known for their abortifacient effect. Some women have experienced severe bleeding, but the scientists believe that can be done away with if the dosage is adjusted. In any case, the drug is heralded as a solution to the abortion controversy. No doubt about its abortifacient mechanism, but because it is used so "privately" and so early, it would be impossible to track. And if enough euphemisms can be thought up -- "post-coital contraception", "pregnancy interceptor", etc. women will not even pay much attention to their monthly abortion. No doubt the scientists will find the right chemical mix to diminish, if not eliminate, the side effects. But it's much harder to erase the

realization that the monthly washout is in most cases nothing other than the destruction of new offspring, especially as test-tube babies proliferate. In any case, we have an early warning that every effort must be taken to highlight the humanity and the value of the unborn, from fertilization on.

DIVORCE STATISTICS & TRENDS

The National Center for Health Statistics tells us that the U.S. divorce rate declined in both 1982 and 1983, following 20 years of increases. The 1982 decline was 4%, in 1983, 1%. The declines are not great, and cannot be said to signal a new trend. In fact, when one looks at the patterns of divorce, i.e., shorter marriage time, absence of serious problems, lack of counseling -- the statistical decline is almost cancelled.

On another plane, Lenore Weitzman, a sociologist-lawyer at Stanford University, has written a comprehensive and informative analysis of no-fault divorce laws, focusing primarily on the California experience. Weitzman finds that the major economic result of the new laws is the systematic impoverishment of divorced women and their children. But at a deeper level Weitzman also recognizes that no-fault divorce "has altered the obligations of the marriage contract, and, as a result, is creating new norms and new expectations for marriage and family commitments in our society." Weitzman's study, then, not only forces us to reexamine divorce laws, but to think again about the overall impact of easy divorce on marriage, on children, and on the overall society. (The Divorce Revolution, L. Weitzman, New York, Free Press).

DIOCESAN ACTIVITIES

The Staten Island NFP group of the Archdiocese of New York has initiated a concerted program to spread awareness of NFP in the parishes of Staten Island. The

program began with an information day for doctors. Dr. Claude Lanctot of the International Federation of Family Life Promotion addressed the attendees. This was followed by two afternoon sessions for priests, at which a couple explained the basic facts of NFP followed by a discussion with a priest and a doctor. The sessions were held to two hours. A mail and phone campaign was used to invite the priests. The NFP couples now intend a speedy follow-up with the priests with the prospect of their serving as recruiters of new couples.

Fr. Robert Miller and Fr. Dennis Kaelin have been appointed chaplains for the NFP movement in the Archdiocese of Newark. They will work closely with the teaching couples and be involved in general promotion in the parishes.

The Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon will sponsor a two-day regional NFP conference on February 21-22, 1986. The conference is an update for NFP teachers and clients, with special sessions for the clergy and religious. Speakers include Dr. James Statt and Robert and Mary Kambic. For more information contact Dennis Kennan at (503) 277-5509.

The Illinois NFP Association will sponsor a regional conference on March 21-23, 1986. Speakers include Fr. Benedict Ashley, OP; Dr. James Statt; Dr. Philip Galle; NFP provider groups and breastfeeding groups. For more information contact Donna Dausman at 217-422-8234.

UPDATE ON AID's REFERRAL POLICY

In June, 1985, USAID Administrator Peter McPherson effectively reversed AID's long standing referral policy. The decision met with opposition from family planning agencies and from many media types who distorted the reasons for and implications of

the policy reversal. In September Senator Dennis DeConcini introduced a congressional mechanism to restore the old policy. Ultimately DeConcini's ploy emerged as an amendment to the continuing resolution that takes the place of the Appropriations Bill. As a result, the old AID referral policy is now back in force, and will likely be carried along when a new Appropriations Bill is considered.

Serious efforts were made to persuade DeConcini and his colleagues not to adopt this amendment, but without success. There is a strong Congressional constituency in favor of family planning and a well constructed lobby. This episode demonstrates that considerably more systematic and long-term efforts are needed to change attitudes in Congress on family planning issues, and to gain understanding and respect for NFP.

"IN PRAISE OF CHILDREN"

In his January 13, 1986 Newsweek column economist Robert Samuelson sings the praises of a child, specifically his own infant. Samuelson explains the birth dearth, and the low value ascribed to childbearing, in terms of changed economic trends. In technological society, children are not workers and thus not economic assets. Women have more education and employment opportunities and many have a need to work outside the home. These economic realities, in Samuelson's view, induce an ambivalence, indeed a reluctance, in regard to children. But Samuelson also recognizes "the immense joys, constant surprises or sheer fun" which he was unable to anticipate, and hopes that others will not miss out. The value of the child should be kept in the forefront of all discussions regarding parenting. Otherwise the decision making process is dominated by economic concerns and the contributions that children make to parents and families are largely ignored.